

# Ask A Biologist

by Karen Fothergill

## Question:

Why are pheasants considered resident game birds when they are native to Asia?

## Answer:

Resident game birds refers to non migratory species such as pheasants, wild turkeys and quail, opposed to migratory game birds like ducks, geese and doves. Terms such as native and non-native are used depending on whether the species has existed in an area naturally or has been introduced through human events, either intentional or accidental. For example; pheasant and wild turkeys were both introduced intentionally for the purpose of hunting, and are considered resident and exotic. Mourning doves are a native and migratory species.

## Question:

I have noticed two words in italics following the names of plants and animals in my field guides. Looks like Greek to me! Can you tell me what they mean?

## Answer:

These are the species' scientific names written in Latin, and might actually contain some Greek root words. Many areas of science, particularly biological sciences, use Latin as the universal language. The first word in a scientific name is the Genus and the second is the species designation. Both must be written together, in italics or underlined. This is the nomenclature (naming system) that scientists use worldwide. Although common or local names for a species might differ from area to area the scientific name is always the same. There are two codes that govern the naming of a species. For plants it is the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature*, and for animals the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*.

Species names generally express a morphological (form and structure) characteristic



of the species, location where it is found and/or the name of the person who first described the species. For instance, the genus for Chinook (also called King) salmon is *Oncorhynchus*. The Latin root word onco means hook, rynchos means snout or nose. The translation is hooked snout, and if you have seen the male Chinook salmon when it is migrating up stream to spawn, the snout is elongated and hooked. There is a shrub in Europe with the scientific name *Monticola fothergilli*. This shrub was first described by an English botanist named John Fothergill and he used the Latin form of his sir name to name the shrub.

Scientific nomenclature used in naming species is a part of a much bigger structure where all living things are organized into categories of relatedness called taxonomy. The *Linnaean* system is the traditional system organized from least related to most related. Starting with **Kingdom** this system is split into five categories, Animalia and Plantae (animals and plants). From Kingdom there is a series of splits. Each level of splitting is called a taxon, and organized as follows;

Kingdom>Phylum>Class>Order>Family>Genus>species

The final two levels, Genus species is where the scientific name for each species is generated. Think of it as the family tree of all living things.